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ABSTRACT

Adopt-A-School programs are models of school-community involvement and cooperation in which businesses, organizations, and industries adopt schools and contribute funds, personnel, or expertise to those schools for programs, projects, and services. This bulletin highlights the Adopt-A-School program in the Oakland (California) Unified School District and suggests programs, projects, and services that businesses, organizations, and industries might offer to schools. (Author/MLF)

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Technical Assistance Bulletin

School-Community Cooperation: Oakland's Adopt-a-School Program

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Summary

Adopt-A-School programs are models of school-community involvement and cooperation in which businesses, organizations, and industries adopt schools and contribute funds, personnel, or expertise to those schools for programs, projects, and services. Through such support and input, schools gain programs and services they would not otherwise have and are enabled to continue to grow, change, and provide students with the kinds of curriculum and growth-producing learning experiences they need. Faculty and students experience fresh viewpoints, ideas, and concepts and gain links with the world outside the classroom. Adopt-A-School programs are operating successfully in several communities across the country, including Oakland, California, Boston, Massachusetts, and Dallas, Texas. This bulletin highlights the Adopt-A-School program in the Oakland Unified School District and suggests programs, projects, and services that businesses, organizations, and industries might offer to schools.

The Problem

Today's schools often need a greater range of services and programs for their students than they are able to provide. Many schools are faced with budget cuts and fewer faculty and find it difficult to maintain and create a learning environment that is exciting, challenging, and responsive to their students. Without such an environment, and community input and support, schools may become isolated from their communities and unable to provide needed learning and growing experiences for their students.

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The Solution

In the Adopt-A-School program in Oakland's Unified School District, businesses, industries, and organizations work in and with schools and provide funding, projects, personnel, and expertise to establish programs or offer services that the schools deem necessary. Involvement ranges from corporate contributions to total sponsorship and initiation of programs. Businesses support schools financially or offer skills and expertise that are unique--and needed in the schools.

Oakland began its Adopt-A-School program during the 1975-76 school year. The program, promoted by the school district superintendent and advertised by the local chamber of commerce and the school district director of community relations, continues to grow each year as more businesses and organizations become involved.

The procedure used in the Oakland School District is as follows. After a business or organization has expressed interest in adopting a school, and a school has been chosen, a representative from the superintendent's office, the principal of the designated school, and top managers of the business or organization meet to discuss ways to assist the school. Representatives from the school and select a project; a proposal is submitted to the school with a tentative budget and a memorandum of understand-

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the various professions and supply students with union contracts delineating salaries, benefits, and working conditions.

Saint Luke's Society, an organization of doctors and ministers in the Oakland area, has also worked with students. Students "shadow" doctors in the hospitals and their offices and ministers in their calls and visits in order to learn more about these occupations.

Results

Businesses, organizations, and industries that participate in Adopt-A-School programs offer projects, services, and funding that schools would not have otherwise. Program results are both tangible and intangible. Where reading skills classes have been promoted, student reading ability has often risen dramatically. Students who were apathetic, passive, and uninterested in books now use the libraries, attend classes, and are generally enthusiastic. Because students are not as fearful or angry, there is less vandalism. Students and teachers are happier, morale is higher, and the environment is safer and more conducive to learning.

Replication Issues

In planning for Adopt-A-School programs, which may be implemented in any school and its community, it should be noted that there are four major kinds of contributions that businesses, industries, and organizations can make:

- Funding--Businesses and organizations can contribute funds to a school for all kinds of projects the school could not afford otherwise (for example, a new reading lab, or computer equipment).
- Projects--Community leaders can work with school personnel to develop new projects for the students (for example, classroom or club projects).
- Personnel--Businesses or organizations can provide personnel to lecture, assist in program development, or work as consultants (for example, a businessman can teach an economics course or a business course).
- Expertise--Businesses or industries can lend their expertise to schools in developing new programs and new projects. (An engineer can advise faculty on suitable courses for students.)

Other specific projects for community involvement suggested by the Oakland Unified School District include--

- Student tutoring--Businesses or organizations can grant employees release time to tutor students. (This can be in remedial math or reading, or involve new subjects--economics, psychology.)
- Resource persons--Businesses or organizations can provide speakers for classes, assemblies, or special programs.
- Cultural events--Businesses can sponsor field trips or tours to cultural events.
- Clubs--Businesses or organizations can sponsor clubs--book, art, foreign language, cooking, research--which are related to the curriculum.
- Apprentice programs--Businesses or organizations can place students as interns or apprentices. (Students have worked in offices, labs, hospitals.)
- Career development--Businesses or organizations can participate in career development curriculum or work to develop career days.
- Maintenance--Businesses or organizations can support students to maintain or renovate school property.
- Incentives and awards--Businesses can provide prizes, certificates, plaques, and other awards for schools and/or students for outstanding accomplishments.
- Staff development--Businesses or organizations can provide inservice education to staff in

areas of expertise--management training, economics, computer instruction, business education.

- Special projects--Businesses or organizations can support innovative activities they deem important--a reading or math lab.

Because businesses and individuals who devote their resources to school programs need and deserve to have the results of their efforts measured and publicized, a suitable method of measuring results and making them available should be part of every community involvement plan.

Required Resources

Each school must survey its needs and identify community resources to fill them. The resources which the school can donate to this program include the planning and coordinating time of the staff person who organizes the Adopt-A-School program as well as the use of space and equipment.

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For further information on this program, or to request direct technical assistance in implementing a similar program, contact the National Center or the Regional Center nearest you. NSRN technical assistance is available at no cost to requestors.